DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 095 761 HE 005 834

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TITLE The State of the Art of College Trusteeship. A Situation Review.
INSTITUTION Frantzreb and Pray Associates, Inc., Arlington, Va.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 25p.
AVAILABLE FROM Frantzreb and Pray Associates, Inc., 1500 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22209 ($2.50)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.85 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Problems; Colleges; *Educational Administration; Essays; *Governing Boards; *Higher Education; *Presidents; *Trustees; Universities

ABSTRACT

This essay was written in response to requests for a summary of the author's current thinking on college and university trusteeship based on his long experience as consultant to trustee boards and trustee behavior. Among his conclusions are the following: (1) Higher education trustees set the goals for the institution, assure a distinctive program, create and maintain superior management, provide adequate financing, and provide distinguished sponsorship. (2) As roles of boards of trustees become appreciated and understood, one may expect that implications for trustee membership, board organization, and board operations will become clearer. The author focuses special attention on the following: composition of the board, renewal, morale, and accountability. Since the role of the president is so important in his relationship to the trustees, the author sums up his opinions on the role of the president. The document closes with a mini-test for the trustee and for the president. (Author/PG)

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The State Of the Art Of College Trusteeship

A Situation Review

by

Francis C. Pray, Chairman

Frantzreb and Pray Associates, Inc.

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This essay was written in response to many requests for a summary of the author's current thinking on College and University trusteeship based on his long experience as consultant to trustee boards and student of trustee behavior.

1500 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22209
June, 1974

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COLLEGE TRUSTEESHIP

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Men and women as individuals, students, and parents, governments, churches, foundations and corporations like to put their support behind dynamic, growing, exciting, well-managed enterprises which have goals which are relevant to important human needs, show evidence that they know where they are going, and have a plan for getting there.

The image and the activity of the board of trustees, its competence in providing quality leadership, and its commitment to and performance in service to the institution are the key to gaining this support.

What is the present state of the art of trusteeship? This essay is a situation report.

The Principle of Lay Leadership is Reaffirmed!

Interest in trustees is at an all time high. Church boards of education have publications for trustees of their colleges. Trustees of New York State colleges come together annually for a conference on mutual problems. A special bulletin of The Chronicle of Higher Education is prepared especially for trustees. The Association of Governing Boards is a national membership arena for discussion of trustee problems. The Association of Community College Trustees has set up its own office. Panels and discussions of trustee roles and responsibilities are featured at practically every major educational conference concerned with institutional management. Institutes on the roles of trustees are mounted by cooperating groups of institutions under government and foundation support. Many individual institutions have annual trustee retreats for orientation and discussions of special problems in depth. Handbooks for trustees have been published by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, the Board of Education of the United Methodist Church, the Regents of the State of New York and by others. Studies of trustees have been launched and reports published by the Carnegie Corporation, the Council For Financial Aid To Education, and others.

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Truly the age of the trustee has come. How the individual trustees respond and how boards perform will determine the future of higher education in America.

The current wave of interest and concern comes at a most appropriate time.

A recent study* shows that the percentage of the public expressing a "great deal of confidence" in education dropped from 61% in 1966 to 37% in 1971 and to 33% in 1972. These percentages of confidence are lower than those in medicine, finance, science, and the military.

One might speculate what the comparable percentage of confidence in college trustees might be today, but one is rather shaken by the fact that while no reputable persons, to our knowledge, have advocated widespread closing of our colleges and universities, a number of reputable educators have seriously raised the question as to whether or not there is a viable role for boards of trustees.

In an atmosphere at many institutions where the trustees are seen as disputatious, uninformed, and reactionary, or in many others where policies of non-disclosure of finances and secrecy in the decision-making process have prevailed, one finds the lack of confidence in the trustees and doubts as to their viability easy to understand.

Yet the principle of providing lay policy leadership continues valid.

The evidence is overwhelming that when any professional group is left entirely to itself, whether it be a church, the military, a government, or an educational system, syndicalist structures become dominant. Traditions, the instinct for self-protection, and resistance to change combine to stultify progress and bring the organization to a further and further remoteness from public concerns and needs.

The record of performance by lay leadership, when functioning effectively, argues strongly that viability is inherent in the structure and that the problem is one of encouraging better performance and evolutionary change to adapt to new opportunities.

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*Louis Harris poll, reported in The Chronicle Of Higher Education, December 14, 1972.

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So, too, with boards of college and university trustees. With all their problems no one, in the opinion of this writer, as someone once said about democracy, has come up with a better system. Making the lay policy leadership system work is another matter.

We would strike a note of optimism. In the current criticism of the roles of trustees in many independent institutions, and in the turmoil of organization of boards of new public colleges and in the searching for a better definition of purpose for boards of more established institutions, there is emerging, it seems to us, the recognition that there is a body of practical experience which can be drawn upon to make boards of trustees more effective.

A decade or so ago it was difficult to find a substantial literature dealing with composition, organization, and operation of boards of trustees in the field of education. Today the number of studies, articles, and essays is legion. Principles for the various phases of "trusteeship" have been evolved, articulated, and tested. Boards which were the preserve of the businessman have been leavened by the addition of educators, members of minorities, youth, and women. Trustees are being held to higher accountability. A sort of Magna Carta or Vatican II has been accepted in principle to suggest that accountability must accompany responsibility and privilege, even at the top echelon of educational governance.

What principles seem to be emerging? What is the real role of college trustees, anyway? What modes of composition, of organization, and operation will characterize boards in the 1980's?

The Role of the Board

Concepts of the role of trustees range all the way from that of the crusty old-timer who says, "We run this place," and does, to that of the beleaguered chairman who says, "We just try to keep the college running and the wolf from the door one year at a time."

While ultimate responsibilities of boards may seem clear in law, they are less clear in practice. The trustees of Columbia University, in adopting a report of a study committee* agreed that:

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*The Role of the Trustees of Columbia University: The Report of the Special Trustees Committee; adopted by the Trustees, November 4, 1957. (Emphasis given as in The Report.)

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"The major legal responsibilities which devolve upon trustees are, in the opinion of this Committee, three:

"(a) to select and appoint the President of the University;

"(b) to be finally responsible for the acquisition, conservation, and management of the University's funds and properties;

"(c) to oversee and approve the kind of education offered by the University, and make certain that its quality meets the highest standards possible."

No one would quarrel with the responsibility of selecting and appointing the president or being responsible for conservation and management of funds and properties. Where the Committee struck new ground in the concepts of most trustees was in pointing out that the trustees are also "finally responsible for the acquisition . . . of funds"; and that they must "oversee and approve the kind of education offered and make certain that its quality meets the highest standards possible."

Accepting the final responsibility of the "acquisition" of funds is resisted by many boards, even abhorent to many trustees. Responsibility for overseeing the kind and quality of education offered is a concept unfamiliar to perhaps a majority, except as lip service.

In another fundamental study of trustee roles, that of the board of trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, by Donald R. Belcher, the question is asked:

"Is this University carrying out, to the maximum extent of its resources, those educational and research functions which are not only consistent with the objectives of its donors but best calculated to serve the needs of society in our day and in the foreseeable future?"*

Thus is introduced a fourth role, that of sharing a responsibility for seeing that the educational institution is operated in the public interest, an obligation which is responsive to the expectations of society

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*The Board of Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, by Donald R. Belcher, The University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1960.

which provides tax relief and tax support for the college or university in the belief that it performs a socially useful function.

A fifth role, that of institutional sponsorship, is suggested by this writer, although it includes and suggests overtones of certain roles reviewed above. The quality of sponsorship which connotes advocacy is here the further dimension.

In public presentations, in addresses and articles, especially in discussion with scores of individual trustees, there has seemed to be developing a consensus that the foregoing provide a basic set of expectations of trustee performance. These may be restated and expanded as follows:

1. To Set the Goals.

Muddy administration and confused faculties and incomplete planning follow a failure of the governing board to agree on and articulate clearly and persuasively the fundamental mission or goals of the institution.

While young faculty, eager administrators and even a few students are constantly asking, over coffee in the cafeteria, "What are the goals of this institution, anyway?", most boards of trustees act as though their primary purpose is to answer the needs of the day, respond to the calls of nature of the institution, and balance the budget. Committees report with more or less regularity on details of the audit, the state of the physical plant, the return on the endowment; some may give attention to the problems of student affairs or student recruitment, government support or private funds development. But seldom is there serious discussion or adequate time for study given to the task of defining or redefining the social goal of the institution, its basic purposes, or its general strategy for accomplishment.

The board of the future will not have the luxury of avoiding these problems which demand hard straight thinking, detailed and complete staff work, objective analysis and evaluation by experienced counsellors, and a willingness to be objective about the sacred cows and mythologies which may characterize the governance pattern. In their role as trustees of the institution for others (the public interest, in this case, implicit in tax exemption and other privileges) the trustees must satisfy themselves

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that the institution is, indeed, meeting a valid social concern. Perhaps to their surprise, but certainly to their satisfaction, they will find that as it does so it will prosper. In setting up subsets of goals, the trustees will perform their function of governance by concerning themselves with the effectiveness of management, evaluation of accomplishment, and gathering the necessary support.

In this role the trustees serve as a bridge between the larger environment and the institution, interpreting through their policy directives their understanding of the needs of society which may be met by the institution, helping to keep its goals aligned with changing factors in our society and guiding the plans which will result in successful accomplishment.

2. To Assure a Distinctive Program.

The Columbia trustee would call this responsibility one of assuring "quality". We would say rather that the trustees must assure themselves not only that the program of the institution is of a general high quality but that it is distinctive in those areas where the institution has special resources and where it can best respond effectively, economically and consistently to its highest priority objectives.

They must develop an understanding of the criteria used in the field of education to measure quality and will be assiduous in examining the quality of the product and the quality of the process while recognizing the integrity of the faculty and the responsibility of the faculty and management to determine the means.

3. To Create and Maintain Superior Management.

Many boards of trustees accept the responsibility for electing a president and, once having done so, settle back to "let him run the institution," thus abdicating their continuing legal responsibility for policy direction and oversight of the quality of management performance. Some boards live for years with unsatisfactory management in the belief that it is somehow not their fault if things aren't going well. Changes are too often made only under conditions of the most severe stress.

We would assert that the trustees are also ultimately responsible for the performance of management and must not only select the president,

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but must assure themselves, from time to time, through proper evaluative processes, that management is carrying out the policies of the board, making substantial contributions to the accomplishment of the objectives of the institution, and effectively managing its program and resources within the policy rubric.

Fortunately, an increasing emphasis on the legal responsibilities of lay leadership is persuading many boards that they must consider this role with increasing seriousness.

4. To Provide Adequate Financing.

In a great many independent institutions, and in most public institutions, the trustees, seeking comfort, have traditionally thought to perform this role by managing resources provided by others. The board which accepts its full responsibility for the success of the institution, however, will become an enthusiastic advocate for required support from government, church, and all constituencies. As individuals, trustees will be expected to be personally and meaningfully committed and responsible participants in the institution's effort to accumulate private support, as well.

In addition, trustees must assure themselves that the physical resources of the institution are managed intelligently for highest return on the financial side and for highest productive contribution to the educational program on the physical side.

One of the saddest performances observed by this writer was the action of the board of one state university as it seemed to accept its role as one of saving the state money by paring the university budget rather than its proper role of seeking public money adequate to the pressing needs of the university in its endeavor to serve the people of the Commonwealth. Nor is this attitude confined only to public boards. It is demonstrated by the possessive board operating a church-related institution which is jealous of its rights to represent the church but fails to represent the full opportunities of the institution.

5. To Provide Distinguished Sponsorship.

The role of sponsorship of the institution is generally neither well understood nor aggressively implemented.

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No matter how individuals may argue in private, the prestige of the college or university in last analysis will reflect the degree to which the board brings to its policy guidance distinguished performance, loyalty, and trust. While sponsorship as a role is a concommitant of other roles of trustees, as a special asset it is compounded of the ability to act with humaneness, cooperativeness, and intelligence on behalf of the institution - the institution before politics, before self-interest, before comfort.

The search for an answer as to how well it may seem to sponsor the institution, in the public eye, might give pause to many an aggregation of otherwise self-satisfied trustees.

Expectations for the 80's.

As roles of boards of trustees become better appreciated and understood - and accepted - we may expect that implications for trustee membership, board organization, and board operation will become clearer. Some of these implications have already been recognized and implemented by boards of a number of independent and of some public institutions. It will not surprise anyone to note that the institutions whose boards are having the greatest difficulties in shaking down to sophisticated comprehensive leadership roles are those which have been historically heavily church-dominated, many of the public community colleges, and a host of the state colleges and universities which have recently exploded from earlier status as technical institutes, colleges for teachers, or other locally oriented functions. Yet even boards of older more established institutions are in a state of self-examination in modes resembling the studies at Columbia and Pennsylvania, using more sophisticated tools now emerging from trustee institutes, work of counsel to trustees, and students in the field.

We predict continued and perhaps increased attention to the following:

1. Composition of the Board.

The variety of roles to be played by the Board requires a variety of skills, experience, and background which is too much to expect of any individual member. Alert boards, therefore, are increasingly analyzing the needs for these qualities and exploring carefully a recruitment process

which will provide them. While commitment, interest, and individual competence in some given area are sine qua non, a board of trustees for a distinguished technological institute which does not contain a single distinguished engineer, a board of trustees for a church-related college which has half of its members from the clergy and contains no distinguished financial management expertise, or a board of trustees of a public institution composed primarily of politically oriented men and women and which has failed to provide itself with top management know-how or distinguished educational representation, hardly is in a position to act creatively on behalf of the institution, no matter how well it may represent the public, a church, or a government.

Attention to the composition of the board, therefore, is a first prerequisite in being sure that the aggregation of men and women responsible for policy direction of the institution contains that complex of skills, knowledge and background necessary for effective decision. Some use special tools developed and tested by trustee counsel*; some rely on more subjective methods; but the attempt must be made in the interest of implementing the role.

> As a special case of the problem of composition of the board, nothing has been more dramatic in recent years than the degree to which the deliberations of trustees have been exposed to public scrutiny and the pressure for opening up board membership under the demand for greater responsiveness.
>
> The demand for student and faculty voting membership on the board has been persistent in past years although now may be ebbing as a result of other practices which accomplish the same purpose.
>
> This writer resists the move toward placing students or faculty of an institution on its board of trustees. This violates the principle of separation of role, responsiveness, and dilutes the effectiveness of operation. Should trustees vote in the selection of courses in chemistry?
>
> On the other hand, we strongly support the principles which call for openness, better communication, and a system of participation by elements of the institution in the process of arriving at judgments.

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*"Match Your Trustees To Your Needs" by Francis C. Pray, College and University Business, February, 1973, provides a worksheet for such processes.

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> The most successful device for accomplishing genuine interface between board and elements of the institutional family is the growing practice of having students and faculty representation on trustee committees with full and genuine invitation to participate in the process of developing the materials on which trustee judgments will ultimately be made. Whether or not the non-trustee members participate with equal vote with trustee committee members in trustee recommendations or whether only the trustee segment of the committee authorizes the report to the board is relatively immaterial. Experience shows that where genuine community is evolved, the facts in most cases lead to consensus and the issue seldom arises. If it does, majority and minority reports may be submitted for the guidance of consideration by the entire board on the issues of policy.
>
> Presence of representatives at trustee meetings is also a growing practice. It has resulted not only in better communication and awareness of institutional problems but also in many cases has stimulated the board, under scrutiny, to a higher standard of performance.

2. Organization of the Board.

Given a board composed of dedicated, committed members, balanced as to qualities and background, powerful and influential enough to move with effectiveness on behalf of the institution, what are the trends in organization?

Over the years trustee organization has varied from committees of the whole to proliferation into many different and sometimes conflicting structures. The latter has been the rule rather than the exception.

The present trend is to shake down into an executive committee and four or five basic committees dealing with academic matters, student affairs, business affairs, and development and public relations. It is common also, to find committees on investments, buildings and grounds, audit, nominations, planning, research, church relations, government relations, and so forth.

Committee structure seems to have followed the interests and experience and concerns of the trustees and to a degree the management structure of the institution rather more than the needs and organization of the educational and resource development process. Thus, while one or at the most two committees are assigned the whole area of education (the guts of the typical institution), other committees function with relatively narrow purposes in such a way that

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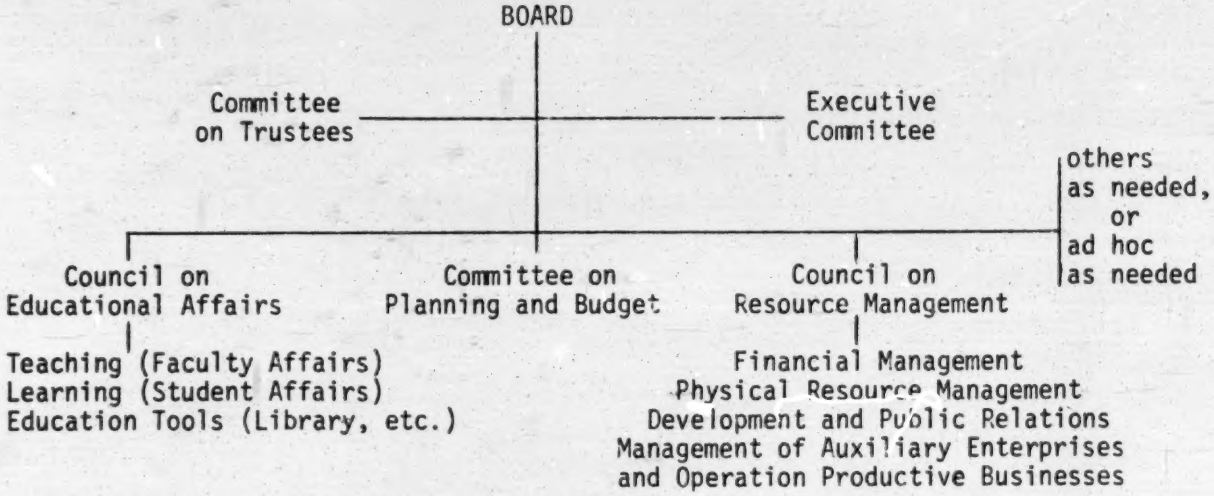
there is little or no possibility of bringing into a comprehensive strategy the total resource of the support programs of the institution. While trustees roam around inspecting paint jobs and building maintenance, and while others worry about managing the portfolio and others organize to assist in fund-raising or government relations, the possibility of developing a total financial strategy is lost in the consideration of problems which bulk equally large and consume equal amounts of time on the trustee agenda whether they deal with building maintenance, financial investments, the budget, or fund-raising.

There seems to be developing, and should, in several institutions a deliberate attempt to arrive at a total resource management strategy, under trustee-sponsored leadership, which would exploit the synergy possible in buiding new relationships between and among the support functions.

At the highest level, therefore, the board of trustees may be developing toward a committee organization which would give senior status to two major efforts - (1) in education and related processes and (2) the total management of financial and physical resources.

A planning committee, charged with constant review of goals, the strategies of budgeting, and so forth, along with a committee on trustees and the executive committee, (held in reserve for emergencies) would complete the organization.

It is not possible in this brief overview to develop the complete rationale for the change, but the writer notes increased interest in discussing organizational patterns for trustees resembling the following.



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This system dignifies the function of members of the board, enlarges their responsibility, provides synergy in educational and resource programs, and provides for a budgeting process which is responsive to goals and planning. It brings to the board the luxury of having responsibility (and time) for discussion of important policy matters and, hopefully, might even provide an opportunity for creating policy by objective rather than by crisis.

3. Operation of the Board.

Board operating problems and the techniques of adequately staffing the board and its committees are at once ones of procedures and of empathy. Lack of space prohibits discussion of the kind of methods which might be helpful, but there are at least three major operational imperatives which deserve special mention.

a. Evaluation.

Board after board, in the writer's experience, has developed uneasy feelings that "things are not going very well," but has seemed to lack either the will for action or experience in methodology which would provide for it the evidence on which to act.

Under the thesis of accountability, we believe the board which accepts responsibility for quality of operation must, in the name of prudence, assure itself on a regular basis that, indeed, the institution is operating in an effective and responsible way.

Trustees call for annual audits of the books of the institution. They call in CPA's and financial investment counsel. They are ready to separate a purchasing agent taking a kickback, or even separate a president if he is guilty of gross mismanagement -- although it has to be pretty gross. But in terms of being informed in order to set a wise educational policy and interpret needs, the board should run an audit of other factors.

A few boards have sought an answer, constructively, by adopting a special bylaw, providing for a rolling evaluation, on a regular basis, of major institutional operations. One such model bylaw provides:

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> Audit and Review. There shall be a periodic audit and review of the state of each of the following aspects of the College; (a) the work of the President, and of his administration; (b) the educational program, including faculty and student affairs; (c) business and physical plant management; (d) development and financing; (e) the Board of Trustee's operations and effectiveness. Each of these aspects shall be examined at least once every five years and one shall be conducted each year. These audits and reviews shall be conducted by ad hoc committees which shall report to the full board. The Chairman of such committees shall be a trustee.

In this way, the prudent trustee can satisfy himself that he understands clearly and objectively the quality of performance of the institution and the adequacy of its management and its programs. A number of college presidents have called for reviews of their tenure on a five-year or ten-year interval. Scheduling audits on a regular basis enhances accountability, provides a non-threatening context, and satisfies trustees' need to know.

We predict that the evaluation or institutional "audit" in this more general sense will become common during the next decade and that trustees will evolve teams comprising not only their own members with special expertise but other volunteers and perhaps paid counsel to assist them in performing the duty of assuring themselves on a regular and systematic basis that the goals and level of performance sought in each of these areas are adequately being attained.

b. Board Renewal.

Trustees, under pressure, are heard to talk more and more about holding management accountable for better performance and have begun to consider how faculty can be persuaded to be more accountable for better education and higher productivity. It is not a giant step to suggest that trustees themselves must be held to a higher standard of accountability, not only because of increased legal emphasis on trustee accountability, but because only by being accountable can the trustees perform their role with that degree of effectiveness which can give the institution its needed security and strength.

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In most cases trustees legally own the institution, if it is private, or at least hold it "in trust" on behalf of a church or a government. It is their own accountability which should give them increasing concern.

Since boards which are essentially self-perpetuating or are the result primarily of political appointment or election tend to remain static in quality, a special effort, it seems to us, must be made on a formal basis to provide for the ingredient of self-study and self-renewal.

An encouraging trend in the operation of at least a few boards is that of organizing a standing trustee committee responsible for the whole process of trustee change, vitality, morale and renewal. It reports to the full board and not through the executive committee.

A number of boards are writing into their bylaws the provision for a committee on trustees, elected by the board and not appointed by the chairman. One such model bylaw reads as follows:

(1) To assess continually and appraise board organization, operation, membership and attendance to assure maximum effectiveness and to make such recommendations from time to time as, in its judgment, will accomplish the objectives of the board;

(2) To maintain a trustee candidate list through a constant search to identify individuals best able to serve the college at the trustee level;

(3) To prepare and maintain a program of orientation for new trustees;

(4) To make nominations for membership on the board and of such offices of the board and committees as are required elsewhere in the bylaws.

Other elements of renewal may be represented in the growing trend toward "roll-over of membership". Under this plan a trustee completing a second four- or third three-year term must leave the board for at least one year before being eligible for re-election. Other boards are providing for limitation of terms of officers of the board. Five or six year terms are recommended as maximum.

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c. Morale and Dignity.

As one who has witnessed the shameful spectacle of open wrangles in board meetings, and, in one case, members of a public board in a public hearing exchanging obscenities with a spectator, it is necessary to stress, again, that boards which cannot attain a high degree of humanity, mutual respect, agreement on decency in interpersonal relationships, are facing a crisis which risks not only their loss of self-respect but the loss of respect for the institution.

One public board, suddenly aware of the spectacle it was creating, adopted a written "gentlemen's agreement" on operational imperatives to provide for orderly transaction of business and found that its own self-imposed restraint began to affect the individual members in producing a new degree of humanity (humaneness) in approaching the troublesome problems of the institution and its constituencies and its publics.

If this quality demands some degree of human greatness, let that be so. If it is a problem which must be consciously faced, then let it be faced openly and honestly. But a board whose individual members cannot overcome the human tendencies to express self-pride, and self-interest, and cannot submerge themselves into a sincere common concern for the institution must face this as a special problem, indeed.

d. Style.

Styles in board operation also seem to be changing.

Two practices common in the past seem to be increasingly giving way to more open style and broader involvement of trustees as individuals.

(1) Governance by a strong board chairman working closely as an individual with the president, common in past years in all kinds of institutions, is giving way under the pressure of more responsible board members seeking their own role, and the recognition that affairs of the institution are no longer simple enough to be handled by cronyism. Where this goes on, trustees should stop it.

(2) Governance by executive committee, often meeting all too frequently, and therefore becoming immersed in operating details, seems to be giving way under two countervailing pressures: the pressure of alert management to do more

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of its own managing and the recognition that this style in which the executive committee makes virtually all decisions and merely reports them to the board results in an inactive and therefore ineffective board resource.

As our whole society is increasingly characterized by "openness" and as many become increasingly convinced that openness, when attained without dilution of responsibility, provides a better basis for judgment, boards will increasingly organize more effectively for decision-making, for broader examination of policy, for more effective sponsorship, and for programs which will give an important role to each member.

That these changes will demand much of the president of the institution goes without saying. That the new board and management style which results should result in more effective service to the educational programs of the institution, is the entire justification. That individuals will find in this kind of operational style greater personal fulfillment and service is a by-product greatly to be stressed in the interest of improved total trustee performance on behalf of the educational and learning process.

e. Accountability.

Trustees over the years have been fond of talking about accountability of students and of faculty and of administration. We now observe that a whole new dimension of accountability is being expected of trustees.

The trustees in one state are reading very carefully the law which says they are responsible to the extent of their personal fortunes if they have failed in prudent management of the institutions in their care. In another state the trustees of a college were sued individually by its creditors for its unpaid bills.

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Illegal acts, misuse of endowment funds, and so forth, are obvious cause for legal action. Now, however, we may see suits based on alleged neglect by trustees of their proper functions of reviewing management, evaluating policies, and providing reasonable answers to deficits and other financial crises. We can at least imagine the possibility of a class action against the trustees by parents or students if the trustees have failed to take reasonable steps to prevent loss of accreditation and consequent "devaluation" of the degree, or provide for safety of personnel; or if they have allowed unwise use of endowment.

How seriously the problem of trustee liability is being taken by one university board is evident in its recent action in providing liability insurance protection in the amount of $1,000,000.

THE PRESIDENT AND THE TRUSTEES

An essay on trustees would not be complete without a word about the role of the president in his relationships with the board.

In almost a classic hen or egg situation poor boards, or good trustees operating ineffectively, are almost always products of the neglect of the president; and poor presidents, or even good men operating at less than true capacity, are almost always products of the indifference or lack of knowledge-ability or lack of commitment of the board.

Great boards do not tolerate indifferent performance on the part of the president. Great presidents are always working to help create powerful and responsive boards.

In every institution where these two elements exist together, the competent president and the competent board, the story is one of institutional success or the confident expectation of success.

Where is the blame to be placed or credit given for failure or success in creating this team?

Many of the problems begin with the selection of the president. Too many searches begin with preconceived notions that "we want a scholar," or a "businessman," or someone who is "young," or someone who has had a great deal of

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"experience". Too seldom does the board in these cases conduct any analysis of the institution to determine what its current and future problems may be to which the president must address himself; too seldom does it go beyond the "references" and recommendations of friends in checking out the capabilities of candidates; too seldom does it reach a clear understanding with each finalist candidate as to its expectations of him in order that he may respond with a fair assessment of his own capacities for the job for which he is being considered.

Once selected, because there are no comprehensive guidelines for the behavior of the college president, although several helpful books and essays on the subject have been written by presidents reviewing their own experience, most chief executives accept their jobs with an unclear perception as to what will be expected of them or how they might organize themselves for performance. The presidents from the academic world, especially, have little or no experience and in many cases not even significant awareness of the problems of creating and working with a major volunteer resource as represented by a board of trustees. Indeed the procedures for working with and building a board run almost counter to the experience and needs of the scholar whose aim is to increase his own personal competence in a discipline and who sees any infringement on this task as something to be resisted or out-maneuvered. One president of a well known Eastern college, indeed, made something of a career out of complaining that the presidency did not permit him to be a scholar. He didn't recognize a new priority, that, as president, his duty was to help others become scholars.

Yet the president who can see himself as beneficiary of the concerns and assistance of a group of experienced and influential men and women concerned collegially in building a great institution reaches his highest potential. Easy for him, thereafter, are the tasks of building an institutional community of quality, of finding and guiding management resources to provide effective use of people, money, and material, in the interests of the teaching and learning process. In this role he will be at the nexus of the operation which coordinates and operates the educational enterprise under wise policy direction and with the assistance implicit in the influence and availability of expertise of the volunteers who comprise the board of trustees.

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If he will see himself not as "running the institution," but as the senior line officer presiding (president) in the efforts of those who may individually bring greater talents than he possesses in each particular field, something unusual will be accomplished.

The competent board will not merely elect a president and then hope for the best. It will have developed guidelines to share with the president as the president helps define institutional priorities. Individually, many trustees may act informally as counsellor and friend to the president, especially as they may have special expertise to offer in management, planning, or the process of change. They will work with him in the process of management review required by progressive bylaws. And they will be ready to be objective if changes must be made.

The president, on his part, must be prepared to work with the board, to give time to the care and feeding of trustees, their psychic as well as intellectual and physical needs. If the president is afraid of strength, uncertain as to his own role, unable to submerge his own ego needs in the task of building the board, the institution will suffer inevitably.*

Many rules of thumb have been stated to guide the allocation of time of the president among his various responsibilities. These range all the way from those suggesting that 25 percent of his time be given respectively to education, student affairs, business affairs and institutional relations, to those of the extremists who would say respectively that (1) first and foremost he must be a scholar and an educator, or (2) his major job is to be a businessman and fund-raiser.

Surely allocation of time among these areas will depend upon changing exigencies, but why has no one suggested that a priority attention to building a great board, using some of the principles outlined earlier in this chapter, will make it possible for the president to be more effective in his other roles?

To paraphrase, presidents must not be afraid of great boards: a few are naturally great, some achieve greatness by the work of accident or of individual trustees, but if not great otherwise, it is the duty of presidents to be sure that greatness is thrust upon them.

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* In an often quoted study of 44 strong institutions, conducted by Paul H. Davis, college consultant to the Readers Digest, he found that without exception, they had, or had had, exceptionally able boards of trustees.

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The president and the board together who achieve greatness in their performance of trust for the institution will have created a tradition and a momentum which in the highest sense will be a crowning accomplishment in the guarantee of institutional stability, security, and service.

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A MINI-TEST FOR THE TRUSTEE

1. Does the Institution Perform a Useful Role? Can each trustee describe this role - forcefully, persuasively? Can he or she explain clearly how the role contributes to society and to humanity? Has the role been reevaluated recently enough to see if it fulfills the mission originally set forth for the institution?

2. Does the Trustee Know Whether or not Programs are of Good Quality? Does the Trustee have Adequate Information as to the Quality of the Faculty? Figures on comparative faculty salaries? Degrees? Does he have a grasp of the tenure problems and their implications for economic and educational policy? Is the board concerned that there be policies to provide flexibility in curriculum as needs change?

3. Does the Trustee Have a Clear Picture as to the Adequacy of Management? Of the president? And his management team? Has the board established a basis for judging the effectiveness of the management team in terms of objectives to be accomplished? Does management provide relevant information for policy-making? Is the budget process and planning operation sound? Is the development operation economically valid? Are the plans for the future both inspiring and pragmatic?

4. Is the Board Itself Effective? Is each trustee the best that can be had - in each role? Are meetings of the board effective experiences? (If not, whose fault is it?) Is there a program to keep the board alert; remove dead wood?

5. Has the Board a Broad Financial Policy? Does each trustee feel a strong personal commitment to participate in the development program? Has the Board reached a consensus as to policies of the institution for government aid? For tuition levels as it affects nature of the student body? Is the management of financial resources aggressive and productive?

Give each question 0 to 20 points, being as tough and realistic as possible in the evaluation. If the board scores 80, it has an effective program but plenty of room for improvement. Administered recently to a group of trustees of smaller colleges, only one scored 70 and one trustee, in frustration, suggested that his board score should be a minus quantity. How about yours?

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. . . AND FOR THE PRESIDENT

1. Do you really want trustees powerful and tough enough to be helpful? Is your ego secure enough to share limelight with trustees? Are you constantly seeking strategies to replace inadequate trustees, even if they are comfortable, safe, and personally supportive, with more able persons? Do you share your defeats, seeking better answers, as well as your victories, resulting in praise? Do you order your priorities to encourage strong trustees to take significant roles?

2. Do you educate your trustees? Is there a formal plan for indoctrination of new trustees, including explanation of the financial picture by the institution's chief financial officer, visits with faculty and students, briefing meetings with senior trustees? Is part of each board meeting a deliberate attempt to go in depth into some significant aspect of education or educational management?

3. Do you keep the interest of your trustees? Are your reports to trustees brief, readable, directed to important issues for policy decisions? Are the problems you bring to the board significant enough to warrant real attention? Are committees professionally staffed and encouraged to tackle real and not superficial problems? Do you avoid leaning so heavily on the executive committee that trustees in general meetings become little more than rubber-stamps? Do you encourage an annual trustee retreat and make it so interesting, challenging (and fun) that a high percentage of the board turns out every year?

4. Do you reward trustees? The excitement of being useful in important matters is a basic reward, but do you remember the niceties of recognitions, thanks to spouses, and other thoughtful acts that build a sense of community between trustees and the institution? Even more importantly, do you encourage students, faculty or others who are the beneficiaries of trustee thoughtfulness and generosity to express their own appreciation?

5. Do you feel satisfied you are doing all you can to maximize the trustee resource?

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Give each question 20 points, being as objective as possible with yourself. As in the preceding test a score of 80 is commendable. Fifty is probably above average, but not therefore encouraging. Anything below 70 suggests that improvement is advisable; below 60 heavy remedial action is called for. As a checkpoint the brave president will ask a savvy trustee or two to rate him - the president - on these points and will discuss the results without defensiveness if they suggest corrective action.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francis C. Pray, Chairman of the Board of Frantzreb and Pray Associates, Inc., a management consulting firm based in Arlington, Virginia, is one of the nation's leading authorities on college trustees. In his former roles as an educational administrator he worked with boards of a variety of institutions; as vice-president, 1958-66, of The Council For Financial Aid To Education, (NY), he organized a national program of institutes for presidents and trustees of colleges and universities and was author of the Council's publication "The New Trusteemanship," used by many administrations and boards as background in their own self-examination; as a partner and co-founder of his present firm he has led institutes on trusteemanship, consulted with scores of boards, spoken widely on the subject before national and regional audiences, and is the author of many articles on such subjects as rating scales for boards, models for composition, trustee accountability, and the trustee role in support programs, planning and governance.